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**Minority Businesses Achieve Dr. King's Dreams  
with New Federally Funded Center in the Gulf Region**  
*MBDA partners with City of Mobile to Redevelop the Local Economy*

MOBILE, AL—With Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday on the horizon, minority business owners, like Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) Group, are celebrating the establishment of the new Alabama Minority Business Enterprise Center (MBEC). The Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce awarded the City of Mobile with a \$200,000 grant to open the new center. The Alabama MBEC will help minority businesses in Alabama successfully compete for contracts as part of the federal, state and local efforts to rebuild the Region.

Joining MBDA National Director Ronald N. Langston at the grand opening was the Mayor of Mobile Samuel Jones, Mobile Chamber of Commerce Executive Vice President Bob Chappelle, Mobile Chamber of Commerce Vice President of Small Business Darrell Randle and the Alabama MBEC Program Director Leon Grove along with financial institutions, business associations, universities, and public officials.

"The opening of the first ever MBDA funded Minority Business Enterprise Center in Alabama, reaffirms the President's commitment to rebuilding the Gulf and its economy, and to the minority business community," said the MBDA National Director Langston.

Clinton Barrows, President of QSR Group, along with other minority businesses was also present at the grand opening of the Alabama MBEC. "The Alabama MBEC is important for the future growth of my company," said Barrows. "With the MBEC's support, I plan to expand my business enterprise, further the creation of jobs in the Mobile communities and help to develop a scholarship to support the youth."

Barrows, the largest owner and franchise operator of 29 Church's Chicken restaurants, represents one of the more than 38,400 minority firms in State of Alabama according to the U.S. Census 2002 Survey of Business Owners and MBDA. Minority firms in Alabama represent almost 13% of all firms in the state, generate close to \$4.4 billion in annual revenues and employ over 43,000 people. The number of minority firms in Mobile and Baldwin counties increased by 26% between 1997 and 2002 compared 12% for all U.S. firms during the same period.

Housed in the GM&O Building in downtown Mobile, the new Alabama Minority Business Enterprise Center will provide management and technical assistance to medium- and large-sized minority-owned businesses striving to impact the local economy by generating higher revenues,  
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creating jobs and expanding into national and global market places. The center's services include client assessment, strategic business consulting, market analysis and access to capital and procurement opportunities.

"Mobile is extremely fortunate to have a MBEC center. The MBEC center will give minority businesses in the city and other communities an opportunity to access the technical assistance they need to be competitive in the global marketplace," said Mayor Jones, the first African American elected to the office. "When you look at Mobile's growth and stable economy, an MBEC center will further enhance our business infrastructure. This center will fill a needed gap in the business community."

The center officially opened on October 1, 2006 and the grant was awarded to the City of Mobile after a rigorous and competitive process. The Alabama MBEC will operate in Mobile. Another resource in the area, MBDA has been funding the Minority Business Opportunity Center in Birmingham to help businesses in bidding on procurement opportunities.

Leon Grove, selected as the new director of the Alabama MBEC, said, "The MBEC will strengthen cultural and economic development in Mobile and Alabama through value-added services designed to increase businesses and cultivate social integration among all residents."

Like MBDA, the Center's performance will be measured by its ability to connect minority businesses with public and private contracts. To date strategic partners such as Mobile Works, Commonwealth National Bank, Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence, and the Mobile Area Water and Sewer System will play a key role in the success of the Center.

Today's event includes an open house, a "check" presentation, and information about available services to minority businesses.

"Minority businesses are the fastest growing segment of all U.S. firms and reaffirming their stake in building the economic base for Mobile and all of Alabama is vital to creating jobs and wealth opportunities for all people," said MBDA National Director Langston. "Given the historical significance of being in Alabama just days from Dr. King's birthday, MBDA recognizes that rebuilding a stronger minority business enterprise community for the Gulf region and for America is instrumental in achieving Dr. King's dream."

To date, MBDA has assisted hundreds of displaced minority firms to prepare and submit applications for disaster relief, emergency loans and insurance claims; reconstructed business plans and other key business documents; assisted more than 1,100 minority firms with the identification of procurement opportunities; conducted education and outreach activities reaching over 4,000 minority business enterprises; and assessed nearly 1,200 firms as viable minority firms with capacity to participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans. For fiscal year 2007, MBDA has targeted \$1.1 million for operation of five minority business centers in the Gulf region.

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#### **About the Minority Business Development Agency, US Department of Commerce**

Founded in 1971 and headquartered in Washington, DC, the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce. MBDA is the only federal agency created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses in this Nation. The Agency actively promotes the strategic growth and competitiveness of minority business enterprises by offering management and technical assistance and access to contracting and financing opportunities through a network of forty local business centers throughout the United States.